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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/17/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: BRV IRRITATED BY AMBASSADORIAL OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

REF: CARACAS 01018

Classified By: AMBASSADOR BROWNFIELD FOR REASON 1.4(b)

Summary

11. (C) VFM Maripili Hernandez convoked the Ambassador on April 12 to complain that his public diplomacy visits to poor communities were inadequately coordinated, and to suggest that we were collaborating with the independent media to provoke incidents during such visits. The Ambassador rejected both assertions, but requested written suggestions on how to improve coordination with the BRV and avoid future incidents. The fundamental problem for the BRV is that despite incessant anti-American propaganda, the Ambassador continues to be warmly received in some of the most chavista parts of the country. The BRV has chosen to view this as an unacceptable irritation, which explains the increasingly violent demonstrations mounted by MVR officials. We'll increase our information flow to the MFA, and continue our visits. End summary.

BRV Annoyance

12. (C) Ambassador and DCM visited the MFA on April 12 at VFM Maripili Hernandez' request to discuss the attack on the Ambassador during his April 7 visit to the Caracas neighborhood of El Coche (reftel). Hernandez asserted that the BRV was finding out about the Ambassador's travel from the media, something she characterized as "irregular and highly inconvenient." She made clear that she had been instructed to "reject" the Embassy's handling of the visit, and repeatedly underlined the BRV view that independent media presence at Ambassadorial events "distorts reality" and incites violence. Hernandez was particularly miffed, she said, because she had discussed this matter in detail during her April 4 meeting with A/S Shannon. She thought the two of them reached an agreement on notifying visits, but the Embassy had not modified its practices. The resulting

incident, she concluded -- making clear that she was echoing the opinion of President Chavez -- could only be interpreted as an "intentional provocation" by the USG.

13. (C) Hernandez said that our visits to poor communities failed to take into account the "political realities" of Venezuela, suggesting that traveling to such areas in "luxury vehicles wearing fine clothing" was an offensively ostentatious display sure to provoke humble Venezuelans. Moreover, the fact that the Coche visit took place so close to the anniversary of the April 2002 coup grated additionally; the strongly chavista population continues to blame the USG and a former Ambassador for their "participation" in the coup. (The Ambassador immediately challenged Hernandez on this point, denying any USG participation in the coup.) Hernandez suggested that the live broadcast of Ambassadorial visits exacerbated the problem, saying that chavistas had a visceral reaction to the presence of U.S. representatives in their communities, and if aware, real-time, of a visit, would mount protests. She called on the Ambassador to ask Globovision not to broadcast his appearance live, in order to avoid this difficulty. The Ambassador said that we respected freedom of expression and would therefore not make any such pitch. (Note: The whole time we sat in Hernandez' office, the TV remained on in the corner -- tuned to Globovision. End note.)

14. (C) Hernandez underlined that additional coordination with the BRV could have helped avoid these problems, but clearly in her view "the Embassy informs Globovision before the MFA on purpose, in order to create an incident." She clearly stated the BRV's "total commitment to respecting the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (VCDR)," and in particular noted that the MFA was not/not requesting the

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Ambassador's daily schedule nor limiting his travels.

USG Amazement

15. (C) The Ambassador expressed amazement that the BRV would suggest that an attack on his person could be construed as a provocation by him or the USG, and categorically denied our purpose was to provoke. He emphasized that he was under explicit instructions to present the best possible image of the United States to the broadest segment of Venezuelan society, and he would not vary from that goal. He pointed out that we advise multiple institutions of the BRV in advance of his travels outside Caracas: the Caracas Metropolitan Police (PM), DISIP, the Office of the Vice President, the minister of defense, and three different offices at the MFA (the minister, the vice minister, and protocol). Inside Caracas, the PM and DISIP are informed before the fact and participate in advance site visits with RSO staff. Because we will continue our outreach, and taking into account that our multilayered notification of the BRV had clearly failed to register with the BRV, the Ambassador asked for a written explanation of how the BRV would have us notify his travels in order to avoid difficulties.

"You tell us what's sensitive"

16. (C) Hernandez responded that we should not expect the PM or DISIP to have the same level of political awareness as the MFA or the Embassy. She suggested that the Embassy should assess all Ambassadorial appearances, and notify the MFA if any have the potential to "cause problems." Pressed again by the Ambassador for an exact, written procedure, Hernandez equivocated, repeating that the Embassy should "figure out where problems may arise" and then inform the MFA. Hernandez took pains to point out that the BRV was not intending to restrict the Ambassador's freedom of movement -- which, she asserted, would violate Article 26 of the VCDR -- despite repeated threats by the Department to limit Venezuelan

Ambassador Alvarez' travels in the United States.

¶17. (C) The Ambassador repeated that we regularly inform high-ranking officials of our travels, and follow all instructions provided thus far by the BRV. He again asked for precise, written instructions on how the BRV wanted to be notified. This is an important matter, he said. Directly challenging Hernandez' earlier suggestion that these attacks were spontaneous popular reactions, he asserted that there have been three violent protests in three weeks, all organized by elected officials of President Chavez' Fifth Republic Movement (MVR). During the Coche protests, some of the motorcyclists who harassed his motorcade, kamikaze-style, had pistols in their waistbands. If the MFA is suggesting that DISIP -- an intelligence agency -- cannot detect threats nor provide security, what procedures would the MFA have us follow? Hernandez repeated the canard first voiced by Ambassador Alvarez that DISIP is not informed of the Ambassador's travels; the Ambassador refuted that.

¶18. (C) The Ambassador returned for a third time to his request for a precise and written notification procedure, noting that he planned to travel to La Guaira on April 20 for another donation ceremony. Tell us how and with whom to coordinate, and we'll do it. Hernandez conceded that, taking into account our belief that the MVR was organizing violent anti-American protests, she could "understand (our) concerns" about giving precise data about Ambassadorial travel to the BRV. She gave her word that the MFA would not organize any protests. The Ambassador said he never believed the MFA was behind such actions, but remained convinced that certain MVR officials in state and local governments were behind recent attacks.

Comment

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¶19. (C) Hernandez was in an untenable position, having to explain how an attack on the U.S. Ambassador constituted a U.S. provocation. The fundamental problem for the BRV is that, despite its frenzied anti-American propaganda, including two dozen specific allegations of nefarious U.S. activities, the Ambassador continues to be warmly received in some of the most chavista parts of the country. One alternative would be for the chavistas simply to dismiss this as a "paradox". But the BRV has instead chosen to view the Ambassador's activities unacceptable irritations. That explains the new and increasingly violent demonstrations mounted by MVR officials.

¶10. (C) At the end of the day, there are only two ways that the BRV can end the pain: first, get us to back down. That won't happen in the current context, and it helps us to be able to say that the Ambassador's barrio visits are at express Washington direction. We will increase the number, level and depth of our notifications to the BRV about the Ambassador's travels, including providing fairly specific information on outreach activities to the MFA a day in advance. Second, they can hope to intimidate our counterparts, those who receive our assistance. To date, we have found counterparts willing to accept our help, and an Ambassadorial visit.

BROWNFIELD